

# A NEW APPROACH

## Drug enforcement organizations team up to take on drug trafficking organizations

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As prescription drug abuse continues to soar in eastern Kentucky, law enforcement officials search for new and innovative ideas to address the issue. According to an FBI study conducted in 2011, 82 individuals lose their lives each month in Kentucky due to prescription drug overdoses. This number is considered to be a very conservative estimate as it does not take into account deaths related to suicide, nor does it take into account the many lives lost on the highways due to impaired drivers. There are additional factors that make this a very conservative estimate.

Many ideas have been implemented in an attempt to stop the scourge with very little effect. These range from members of Appalachia High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area-funded drug task forces traveling to Florida, (one of the many source states of the prescription medication. In an attempt to investigate the doctors and clinic owners,) to Operation UNITE officers attempting to build complex cases on drug trafficking organizations locally. The members of the DTOs organize large groups of individuals, pay all their expenses and provide

transportation to the source states in exchange for a large portion of the prescription medication that is obtained on the trip. The DTOs then bring the diverted medication back to their area of operation and sell the pills to the addicted drug users of the community.

With all their efforts, law enforcement officials face the grim reality that the problem is so enormous they have only been able to make a minor impact on the issue. They have come to the realization that they need a new approach.

Operation UNITE is a non-profit, anti-drug organization formed in 2003 by Congressman Hal Rogers when he noticed an alarming rate of overdoses that continued to soar. UNITE has seen great success in the nearly 10 years of its operation. It not only focuses on the law enforcement aspects of the epidemic, but also addresses the treatment of those addicted. Additionally, Operation UNITE serves as a component to educate citizens before they become victims to the epidemic.

Appalachia HIDTA was initially formed in 1998 to combat the tremendous marijuana epidemic in Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia. In 2002, Appalachia HIDTA became a poly drug and was able to focus on other drugs, as well as marijuana. The HIDTA focuses on dismantling mid- to upper-level drug trafficking organizations by arresting